

Proclamation 7834—National Character Counts Week, 2004

October 18, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Individuals have the power to do much good, and great societies are built by knowing the difference between right and wrong. People of character strengthen our country through their daily actions. To help children fulfill their potential and build a more hopeful future for our Nation, we must continue to encourage and support the character development of our young people and support the institutions that give direction and purpose: our families, our schools, and our faith-based and community organizations.

Americans of all ages continue to inspire others with their compassion and decency by giving their time to faith-based and community organizations and bringing hope to others at home and around the world. The Senior Corps has more than 500,000 caring souls serving in its programs; the Peace Corps has grown to its highest number of volunteers in 28 years; and AmeriCorps will grow by 50 percent to 75,000 members this year. Almost two million students volunteer each year through the Learn and Serve America programs, which incorporate community service as a vital part of education. In addition, more than 1,300 communities have formed Citizen Corps Councils; over 10,000 communities have registered Neighborhood Watch programs; more than 27,000 Americans are serving in the Medical Reserve Corps; over 52,000 citizens have completed Community Emergency Response Team training; and there are more than 68,000 volunteers in the Volunteers in Police Service program. The true strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of its citizens, and these volunteers are making our country better and stronger.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 17 through October 23, 2004, as National Char-

acter Counts Week. I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, parents, students, and all Americans to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-ninth.

George W. Bush

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Remarks in St. Petersburg, Florida

October 19, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. Nothing like spending a Tuesday morning at the ballpark. I can't thank you enough for coming. It lifts our spirits to see so many people here.

It's close to voting time, and I'm here to ask for your vote. We're going to travel your State today, and we'll be back quite often, asking the people of Florida for their vote. I'm also here to ask for your help. See, you can vote now in Florida. So get your friends and neighbors to do their duty. We have a duty in this country to vote. And remind them when you get them headed to the polls, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

As I travel your State giving people a reason why they ought to put me back in office, perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years. I'm really proud of her. I love her a lot. She is a warm, compassionate, great First Lady for this country.

And I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He does not have the waviest hair in this race. *[Laughter]* I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. *[Laughter]* I picked him because of his experience, his judgment, his ability to get the job done for the American people.

And I'm proud of my brother Jeb. In this time of need, he has risen to the occasion. I have seen him comfort those who have been hurt because of these hurricanes. I've seen him put his arms around those who worry about their future. We're doing everything we can to help this State get back on its feet. The Governor of your State is providing strong and necessary leadership to help.

And I know there are some here who are worried about the flu season. I want to assure them that our Government is doing everything possible to help older Americans and children get their shots, despite the major manufacturing defect that caused this problem. We have millions of vaccine doses on hand for the most vulnerable Americans, and millions more will be shipped in the coming weeks. We're stockpiling more than 4 million doses of flu vaccine for children. We're working closely with State and local officials to make sure we distribute vaccines to the most vulnerable Americans throughout our country.

I am grateful to the healthy Americans who are deciding a flu shot—who are declining a flu shot this year so that the most vulnerable of our citizens will get the vaccine. Here in Florida and across the Nation, we will continue to do everything possible to help our citizens.

I want to thank Lance Corporal Taylor Pancake for introducing Jeb and being on the stage. I want to thank him for his service to our country.

By the way, our brother Marvin is with us today. I appreciate you coming, big Marv. There he is, right there. See, we love our family. We've got a great family. There's nothing like being on the campaign trail with a brother you love. I've been looking forward to this day. Not only do I have one brother I love, I've got two brothers I love traveling the great State of Florida.

I'm proud to be able to work with Congressman Bill Young, the great Congressman from Florida. Your attorney general, Charlie Crist, is with us today. Thanks for coming, General. Our Government is working with Charlie to make sure anybody who tries to gouge the seniors of this State when it comes

to the flu vaccines is going to be held to account.

I'm honored that the mayor took time to come by and say hello. Mr. Mayor, Rick Baker, is with us today. Thank you for coming, Mayor, proud you're here. I want to thank all the State and local officials. I'm proud to be on the stage with the next United States Senator from Florida, Mel Martinez. I know him well. He's the right man for the right State at the right time for the United States Senate. Kitty is here too, Kitty Martinez. She's going to make a great First Senator's wife. Thanks for coming, Kitty, great to see you.

I want to thank my friend Lee Greenwood, who's here. I want to thank all the grassroots activists for what you're going to do today and for the next 2 weeks to turn out the vote. There is no doubt in my mind, with your help, we'll carry Florida again and win a great victory in November.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. In the last few years, the American people have gotten to know me. They know my blunt way of speaking. I get that from Mother. They know I sometimes mangle the English language. [Laughter] I get that from Dad. [Laughter] They also know I tell you exactly what I'm going to do, and I keep my word.

You know, our debates highlighted the stark differences between Senator Kerry's views and mine. We have different records. We have different plans for the future. My record is one of reforming education, of lowering taxes, of providing prescription drug coverage for our seniors, for improving homeland protections, and for waging an aggressive war against the ideologues of hate.

My opponent's record is 20 years of out-of-the-mainstream votes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Instead of articulating a vision or positive agenda for the future, the Senator is relying on a litany of complaints and old-style scare tactics.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. As proven by his record and a series of contradictions in this campaign, my opponent will say anything he thinks that will benefit him politically at the

time. I will do what I've said I will do. We will keep the promise of Social Security for all our seniors. We will not have a draft. We'll keep the All-Volunteer Army. With your help on November 2d, the people of America will reject the politics of fear and vote for an agenda of hope and opportunity and security for all Americans.

When I came into office, the stock market had been in serious decline for 6 months, and the American economy was sliding into a recession. To help families and to get this economy growing again, I pledged to reduce taxes, and I kept my word. And we have gotten results for the American people. The recession was one of the shallowest in American history.

Over the last 3 years, our economy has grown at the fastest rate of any major industrialized nation. The homeownership rate in America is at an alltime high. Farm and ranch income is up. In the past 13 months we've added more than 1.9 million new jobs. The unemployment rate in America is 5.4 percent, lower than the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The unemployment rate in Florida is 4.5 percent. This economy is moving forward, and we're not going to go back to the days of tax and spend.

To make sure jobs are here in America, to make sure we continue to be a place where people can realize their dreams, America must be the best place in the world to do business. We need to reduce the burden of regulations on our job creators. We need to do something about the junk lawsuits that are threatening the small-business job creators.

To create jobs here in America, Congress needs to pass my energy plan. It's a plan that encourages the use of renewables like ethanol and biodiesel. It's a plan that encourages conservation. It encourages new technologies like clean coal technologies. It encourages increased domestic production in environmentally friendly ways. We will not drill off the coast of Florida. To keep jobs here, we must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

To create jobs here, we need to reject economic isolationism. See, we open up our markets for products from overseas, and that's good for you. If you have more prod-

ucts to choose from, you're likely to get that which you want at a better price and higher quality. That's how the market works. Rather than shutting down our market, we're working to convince others to open up theirs. I'm saying to China, "You treat us the way we treat you." We can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

To make sure this economy grows, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low. Now, my opponent has his own history on the economy.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. In 20 years as a Senator from Massachusetts, he has built a record of a Senator from Massachusetts. He's voted to raise taxes 98 times.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Think about that. He's been there 20 years. That's a vote for a tax increase about five times every year.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I would call it a pattern. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

Now, the Senator is promising not to raise taxes for anyone who earns less than \$200,000 a year. He said that with a straight face. The problem is, to keep that promise he would have to break almost all of his other ones. See, he has promised more than \$2.2 trillion of new Federal spending. That's trillion, with a "T." And to pay for it he said, aw, he's just going to tax the rich. You know, we've heard that before. You can't raise enough money by taxing the rich to pay for \$2.2 trillion of new spending, so there's a gap—a gap between the promise and a gap between what he can deliver. And guess who usually has to fill that gap?

Audience members. We do!

The President. Yes. I'll tell you what else is wrong with taxing the rich. The rich hire lawyers and accountants for reason: to slip the bill and pass it on to you. We're not going to let him tax you; we're going to carry Florida and win a great victory in November.

When I came into office, our public schools had been waiting decades for hopeful reform. Fortunately, you had a Governor that did not allow the wait. See, he knows what

I know, that too many of our children were being shuffled through, grade after grade, year after year, without learning the basics. I pledged to restore accountability to our schools and end the soft bigotry of low expectations, and I kept my word. Our children are making sustained gains in reading and math. We're closing an achievement gap for minority students. We're making progress in our schools, and we're not going to go back to the old days of mediocrity and low standards.

We have a changing world, and most new jobs are filled by people with at least 2 years of a college education. Yet, only one in four of our students gets there. That's why we will fund early intervention programs at our high schools to help at-risk students. That's why we'll place a new focus on math and science. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation. By raising performance in our high schools, by increasing and expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income families, we will help more Americans start their career with a college diploma.

When I came into office, we had a problem with Medicare. Medicine was changing, but Medicare was not. Let me give you an example. Medicare would pay tens of thousands of dollars for heart surgery but would not pay a dime for the prescription drugs that could prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. That wasn't fair to our seniors. It certainly was not fair to the taxpayers. I pledged to bring Republicans and Democrats together to strengthen and modernize Medicare for our seniors, and I kept my word. Seniors and getting discounts on medicine. And beginning in 2006, all seniors will be able to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

We're moving forward on health care, and there's more to do. We need to make sure health care is available and affordable for our people. We need a safety net for those with the greatest needs. I believe in community health centers, places where the poor and the indigent can get health care. In a new term, we'll make sure every poor county in America has a community health center. We'll do more to make sure poor children are fully subscribed in our programs for low-income families.

We'll do more to make sure health care is affordable. Listen, most of the uninsured are employees of small businesses. Small businesses are having trouble affording health care. To help workers get the health care they need, we should allow small businesses to join together so they can buy insurance at the same discount that big businesses get to do. We will expand health savings accounts so workers and small businesses are able to pay lower premiums and people can save tax-free in an account they call their own.

To make sure health care is available and affordable, we will do something about the junk lawsuits that are running up the cost of health care and running good docs out of practice. By forcing doctors to practice defensive medicine, medical lawsuits cost the Government about \$28 billion a year.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When we say "cost the Government," that means they're costing you, the taxpayer.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. These lawsuits drive up insurance premiums, which drive good doctors out of practice. I've met ob-gyns that are—say, "I can't practice. I can't practice medicine anymore." I met the patients of ob-gyns, anxious women who drive miles to meet a doc. The system is not working. There's a big difference in this campaign. My opponent has voted against medical liability reform. I am for medical liability reform—now. And I will work with Senator Mel Martinez to get it done.

My opponent has a health care proposal of his own, a plan for bigger and more intrusive Government.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Now, the other day in the debate he said, when it comes to his health care plan, and I quote, "The Government has nothing to do with it." I could barely contain myself. [Laughter] The facts are that 8 out of 10 people who get health care under Senator Kerry's plan would be placed on a Government program.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He said the plan would help small businesses. Yet a small-business group studied the plan and concluded it was

an overpriced albatross that would saddle small businesses with 225 new mandates. I want to help small businesses. I don't want to saddle them with Government mandates.

Listen, the choice is clear when it comes to health care. My opponent wants to move in the direction of Government-run health care. I believe the health decisions ought to be made by patients and doctors, not by officials in Washington, DC. He can run, but he cannot hide.

I've set out policies that move America toward an optimistic vision. I believe our country can and must become an ownership society. There's an old saying, no one ever washes a rental car. [*Laughter*] You see, when you own something, you care about it. When you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of our country.

That's why we're encouraging entrepreneurship. Every time a small business is started, someone is achieving the American Dream. We're encouraging health savings accounts so people have the security of managing and owning their own health care account. We will continue to encourage homeownership. I love the idea that more and more Americans from all walks of life are opening up the door where they live and saying, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property."

In a new term, we'll take the next, great step to build an ownership society by strengthening Social Security. In the 2000 campaign, you might remember the ads that were saying, "If George W. gets in, the seniors will not get their checks." The seniors got their checks, and our seniors will continue to get their checks. Baby boomers are in pretty good shape when it comes to Social Security. We're okay.

But we need to worry about our children and our grandchildren. People are understandably worried about whether Social Security will be around when our children and grandchildren need it. We must think differently. To strengthen Social Security, we must allow younger workers to save some of their payroll taxes in a personal savings account, a personal savings account they call their own.

I believe it is the President's problem to solve problems—the President's job to solve

problems, not to pass them on to future generations. My opponent has a different point of view. He wants to maintain the status quo when it comes to Social Security.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He's against the reforms we're talking about when it comes to Social Security, and he's against just about every other reform that gives more authority and control to the individual. On issue after issue, from Medicare without choices to schools with less accountability to higher taxes, he takes the side of more Government control.

There's a label for that. There's a word for that. It's called liberalism. That's what it's called. He doesn't like that label. He dismisses it as just a word. He must have seen it differently when he told a newspaper, "I am a liberal and proud of it." See, he's the kind of—got a voting record that makes Ted Kennedy look like the senior—the conservative Senator from Massachusetts. He can run, but he cannot hide.

I have a different record and a different philosophy. I do not believe in big Government, and I do not believe that Government should be indifferent. I'm a compassionate conservative. I believe in policies that empower people to improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I believe we ought to help men and women find the skills and tools necessary to prosper in a time of change. So we're helping all Americans to have a future of dignity and independence, and that is how I will continue to lead our country for 4 more years.

In a time of change, some things do not change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In times of change, we must support institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. We stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

My opponent's words on these issues are a little muddy, but his record is plenty clear.

He says he supports the institution of marriage but voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against the ban on the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He described the Reagan years as a time of moral darkness.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. There is a mainstream in American politics, and my opponent sits on the far left bank. He can run, but he cannot hide.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing threat of terrorism. The most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

Since that terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're reforming and strengthening our intelligence capabilities. We're transforming our military. I repeat, the All-Volunteer Army will remain an all-volunteer army. We are staying on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will spread freedom and liberty. And we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Think about the world as it was some 3½ years ago. Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida. Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups. Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising. Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons. Iraq was a dangerous place and a gathering threat. And Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks.

Because we acted, because the United States of America led, Afghanistan is a free nation and an ally in the war against terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army

of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice.

We are standing with the peoples of a free Afghanistan and Iraq. It's amazing to say the words "free Afghanistan" and a "free Iraq." I want you to remind your children and grandchildren what has taken place in Afghanistan in the 3½ short years. It wasn't all that long ago that young girls couldn't go to school in Afghanistan, or their mothers were taken into the public square and whipped because they wouldn't toe the line of the ideologues of hate. And yet, because we acted in our self-interest, because we acted to secure our country, the people of Afghanistan are liberated, and by the millions, showed up to vote in a Presidential election. The first voter in the Presidential election in Afghanistan was a 19-year-old woman. Freedom is on the march. Freedom is taking hold in a part of the world that no one ever dreamed would be free, and that makes America more secure.

There will be elections in Iraq this January. Think how far that country has come from the days of torture chambers and mass graves and the brutal dictates of a brutal tyrant. You see, it's important that we continue to spread freedom, because free societies will help us keep the peace. Free societies will no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight the terrorists instead of harboring them, and that will help us keep the peace and make America more secure.

And so our mission is clear. We will help these countries train armies and police so the people of Afghanistan and Iraq can do the hard work of defending their freedom. We will help them get on the path to stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and then our troops will come home with the honor they have earned.

We have a great United States military. It is great because of the dedication and the character of those who wear the uniform. I want to thank the veterans who are here today for having set such a great example to those who wear the uniform. I want to thank the military families who are here today for their sacrifices. You can be certain of this:

Your loved ones are answering one of the great calls of American history. They're defending our country against ruthless enemies. They're spreading freedom and hope. They are winning the war on terror.

And our Nation is keeping our commitments to those who serve and to their families. We have increased basic pay in the military by 21 percent since I've been the Commander in Chief. We've increased health benefits and Federal support for schools on bases across the country. We've reduced out-of-pocket expense for off-base housing to zero for our military families. We are supporting our Guard and our Reserve troops and families. We're spending 14 billion for construction and maintenance on Guard and Reserve facilities. We're extending military health benefits to those in the Guard and Reserves. We're increasing—we will increase monthly education benefits for those in the Guard and Reserves.

Our single most important responsibility is to make sure our military families are well-treated and our military has all the tools necessary to do their missions. And that's why in September of 2003, I went to the United States Congress and asked for \$87 billion of supplemental funding to support our troops in harm's way. This was essential funding. Most Members of the United States Congress understood how important the funding was. As a matter of fact, only 12 Members of the United States Senate voted against the funding for our troops——

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. ——2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out rounding up the vote, remind people of this startling statistic: Only 4 Members of the Senate—4 out of 100—voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against providing funding for our troops.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And two of those four were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You might remember my opponents famous quote. When they asked him about his vote, he said, "I actually did

vote for the \$87 billion, right before I voted against it."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He's given a lot of explanations for that vote since. One of the most interesting ones of all, he said, "Well, the whole thing was a complicated matter." There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in harm's way.

Last Sunday was the one-year anniversary of Senator Kerry's vote against funding for our troops. My opponents many and conflicting positions on this issue are a case study into why his contradictions call into question his credibility and ability to lead our Nation.

In September 2003, as the \$87 billion funding package was being debated, Senator Kerry said this on national TV: "It would be irresponsible to abandon our troops by voting against it." That is, against the \$87 billion. And then, of course, just one month later, he did exactly the opposite. You know, it's important for our fellow citizens to wonder what changed his mind in one short month. Well, his opponent in the Democrat primary, Howard Dean, was gaining ground as an antiwar candidate, just about the time he changed his mind. See, apparently, my opponent decided supporting the troops, even while in harm's way, was not as important as shoring up his political position.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. At a time of great threat to our country, at a time of great challenge in the world, the Commander in Chief must stand on principle, not on the shifting sands of political convenience.

Senator Kerry's vote against supporting our troops in combat is part of a pattern. He has consistently opposed the weapons our troops are using to win the war on terror. He opposed the B-1 bomber. He opposed the B-2 stealth bomber. He opposed the modernized F-14D. He opposed the Apache helicopter. He opposed the anti-missile launchers that we've been using, the Patriot missile system. He has a 20-year history of weakness. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

Let me just give you one more piece of evidence about why my opponent is not prepared and equipped to be the Commander in Chief. He believes that America should

pass a “global test” before we defend ourselves.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. That’s what he said. See, the problem with a “global test” is the Senator can never pass it. In 1990, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution supporting action to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. The international community was united. Countries throughout the world joined our coalition. Yet, even after United Nations approval, Senator Kerry voted against the authorization for the use of force.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You might remember during the debates in the campaign he said it was a “mistake” to remove Saddam Hussein. He would have done it differently. He would have passed another United Nations Security Council resolution——

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. ——as if the first 16 or 17, you know, had an effect. [*Laughter*]

See, we’ll continue to build strong alliances. We’ll work with friends. But I will never turn over America’s national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. In this time of uncertainty and challenge, the Commander in Chief must be steadied and principled and must use every asset at our disposal to protect the American people.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. I’ll tell you what I mean by that. One of our friends, Laura and my friends in the international community is Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. That probably doesn’t seem like much of a big deal to you, except for the fact that 60 years ago, Japan was a sworn enemy of the United States of America. We were at war with the Japanese. My dad—our dad fought against the Japanese. Your dads and granddads did as well. It was a brutal war.

And after the war was over, Harry S. Truman, President of the United States, believed that liberty could transform an enemy into an ally. There were a lot of skeptics during that time, and you can imagine why. Japan was the enemy. Many families had been

turned upside down because of death in World War II. But there was this belief in the country that if we helped Japan become a democracy, the world would be better off for it. Today, because people held that belief, I sit at the table with the Prime Minister of a former enemy, talking about how to keep the peace we all want.

Someday, someday, an American President will be sitting down with the duly-elected leader from Iraq, talking about the peace, and our children and our grandchildren will be better off for it.

I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their freedom. I believe women in the Middle East want to live in a free society. I believe mothers and dads want to raise their children in a free world. I believe all these things because freedom is not America’s gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and woman in this world.

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn’t one of those times. This is a time that requires firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that makes this a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It’s a day I will never forget. There were workers in hardhats yelling at me at the top of their lungs, “Whatever it takes.” I remember the fellow who grabbed me by the arm. He looked me straight in the eye, and he said, “Do not let me down.” Ever since that day, I wake up every morning thinking about how to better protect America. I will never relent in defending our country, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, when I traveled your great State, I made a pledge that if you gave me the chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

Thanks for coming. God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. at Al Lang Field at the Progress Energy Park. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida;

Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist; Mayor Rick Baker of St. Petersburg, FL; Kitty Martinez, wife of Florida senatorial candidate Mel R. Martinez; country music entertainer Lee Greenwood; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks in New Port Richey, Florida
October 19, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. If you're looking for sunshine, Florida is the place to come. I'm looking for votes, and Florida is the place to come. Thank you all for coming out. I'm here to ask for not only your vote, I'm here to ask for your help. Get your friends and neighbors to go to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, remind them, if they want a stronger America, a safer America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

I've got a lot of reasons why you ought to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura will have 4 more years as the First Lady. When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, just so long as I never have to give a speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that deal. She's giving a lot of speeches, and the American people see a warm, compassionate, strong First Lady.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Now, look, I admit it, he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because of his judgment, his experience. I picked him because he can get the job done for the American people.

I'm proud of my brother Jeb. What a great Governor for Florida. I appreciate the strength and compassion he showed during the hurricanes. Florida showed that out of adversity can come good, neighbors loving neighbors, people helping people who hurt. We'll continue to do everything we can to help the people of Florida get back on their feet.

By the way, brother Marvin is with us too. [Applause] Yes. We love our family. And I love campaigning with my family.

I want to thank Sam for his service to the United States of America. He was in the first

gulf war. He's in the second incursion into Iraq. And our country is more secure because of his service.

I want to thank Sheriff Bob White for joining us today. Sheriff, thanks. Appreciate it. I want to thank Daron Norwood, the country music singer, for being with us today.

I want to thank Al Cardenas and all the grassroots activists who are here today. Thank you for putting up the signs. Thank you for making the phone calls. Thank you for working the polls. With your help, we will carry Florida again and win a great victory in November.

In the last few years, the American people have gotten to know me. They know my blunt way of speaking. I get that from Mother. [Laughter] They know that I occasionally mangle the English language. [Laughter] I get that from my father. [Laughter] They also know that I tell you exactly what I'm going to do, and I keep my word.

I enjoyed our debates. They showed the big differences between my opponent and me. We have different records. We have different views of the future. My record is one of reforming education, lowering taxes, providing prescription drug coverage for our seniors, improving homeland protections, and waging an aggressive war against the ideologues of hate.

The Senator's record of 20 years is out of the mainstream. Instead of articulating a vision or a positive agenda for the future, the Senator is relying on a litany of complaints and old-style scare tactics. As proven by his record and a series of contradictions in this campaign, my opponent will say anything he thinks will benefit him politically at the time.

I will do what I've said I will do. We will keep the promise of Social Security for our seniors. We will not have a draft; we will have an all-volunteer army. On November 2d, the people of America will reject the politics of fear and vote for an agenda of hope and opportunity and security for every American.

When I came into office, the stock market had been in decline for 6 months. And then we had a recession. To help families and to get this economy growing again, I pledged to reduce taxes. I kept my word, and the results are clear. The recession was one of the shallowest in American history.